

# Ha Ha Tonka

## STATE PARK

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DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
Division of Parks and Historic Preservation  
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## HA HA TONKA STATE PARK

Ha Ha Tonka State Park comprises 2,481 acres on the Niangua Arm of the Lake of the Ozarks, five miles southwest of Camdenton. The most significant natural and man-made features are concentrated in an area adjacent to the lake and its confluence with Ha Ha Tonka Spring. Within this area exists a rich mixture of natural beauty, geological oddity, romantic history, and abiding mystery unequalled in Missouri.

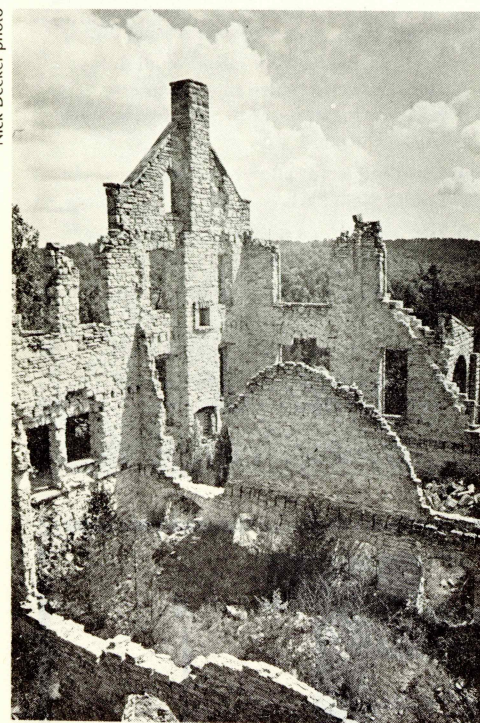
The crystal spring water, wooded hills, and abundant wildlife attracted both Indians and white settlers. The journals of many settlers in the early 1800s mentioned the remarkable features of the area. The first permanent residence was established in 1830 by a man named Garland, who dammed the lower end of the spring and constructed a grist mill. Garland was linked with a band of counterfeiters who used several of the caves as workshops for their trade. Rampant lawlessness in the region spawned vigilante efforts by a group called "Slickers," named for the floggings they gave outlaws.

Just after the turn of the century, the discovery of the region by Robert McClure Snyder, a prominent Kansas City businessman, began a climactic chapter in the story of Ha Ha Tonka. Snyder visited the area and was so impressed with its grandeur that he began purchasing land in the area, eventually acquiring 2,500 acres.

It was in the Ha Ha Tonka area that Snyder conceived and built his dream, a magnificent European-style mansion or castle. The mansion was conceived with 60 rooms grouped on three floors around a central hall rising three-and-a-half stories upward to the skylight. The necessary materials were extracted from the area, with sandstone quarried nearby and transported by a mule-drawn wagon and miniature railroad.

The castle was one man's dream. And for Robert Snyder, that was all it ever was. In 1906, one year after the start of construction, Snyder was killed in an automobile accident near his Kansas City home. The interior of the castle was completed in 1922 by his son, LeRoy Snyder.

Nick Decker photo



Castle ruins

In 1942, sparks from a fireplace kindled a tragic fire that gutted the castle, leaving in its wake only the stark vertical exterior stone walls remaining today.

Efforts to preserve Ha Ha Tonka in its natural state began even before Snyder discovered the area, but were always unsuccessful. The Department of Natural Resources' Division of Parks and Historic Preservation purchased the property in December 1978. The next year, it was opened to the public for hiking, picnicking, and nature study.

## WHAT TO SEE

### One Man's Dream

The stark, vertical stone ruins of Ha Ha Tonka castle are nearly all that remains of one man's dream. In addition to the mansion ruins, visitors can see the stone stable, an 80-foot-high water tower, and the trenches of the nine greenhouses built to attend the main house. Also on the property is the Ha Ha Tonka post office that also served as a general store. The post was established in 1872 and operated until 1937.

## Natural Treasures

Geologically, Ha Ha Tonka is a classic example of a type of topography known as "karst," characterized by sinkholes, caves, underground streams, large springs, and natural bridges. The topography is the result of water that, through the years, has percolated through the underlying dolomite bedrock, a sedimentary rock similar to limestone. The dissolving action of the water along the subterranean cracks or in the dolomite formed elongated openings or caves and, when filled with water, these became underground streams. Springs, common in the area, emerge where the underground streams intersect the valley walls.

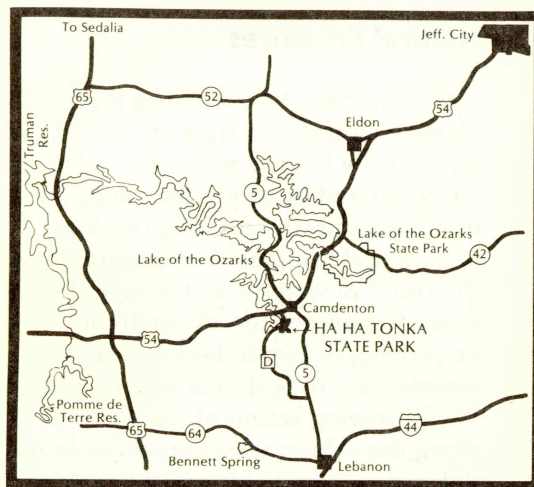
The geological formations of Ha Ha Tonka are the remnants of one immense, ancient cavern system. Sinks or sinkholes, which abound in the park, result when the roof of a cave collapses. Sometimes, a portion of the cave roof will remain after the collapse of surrounding material, leaving behind a natural bridge. Should a series of large rooms adjacent to one another collapse, a valley or "chasm" is formed.

The existence of so many remarkable karst features within such close proximity is unparalleled in the state's natural history. Several of these remarkable features can be seen from trails that wind through the park, including a paved trail for the handicapped. A special trail map can be obtained at the park and guided tours are available.

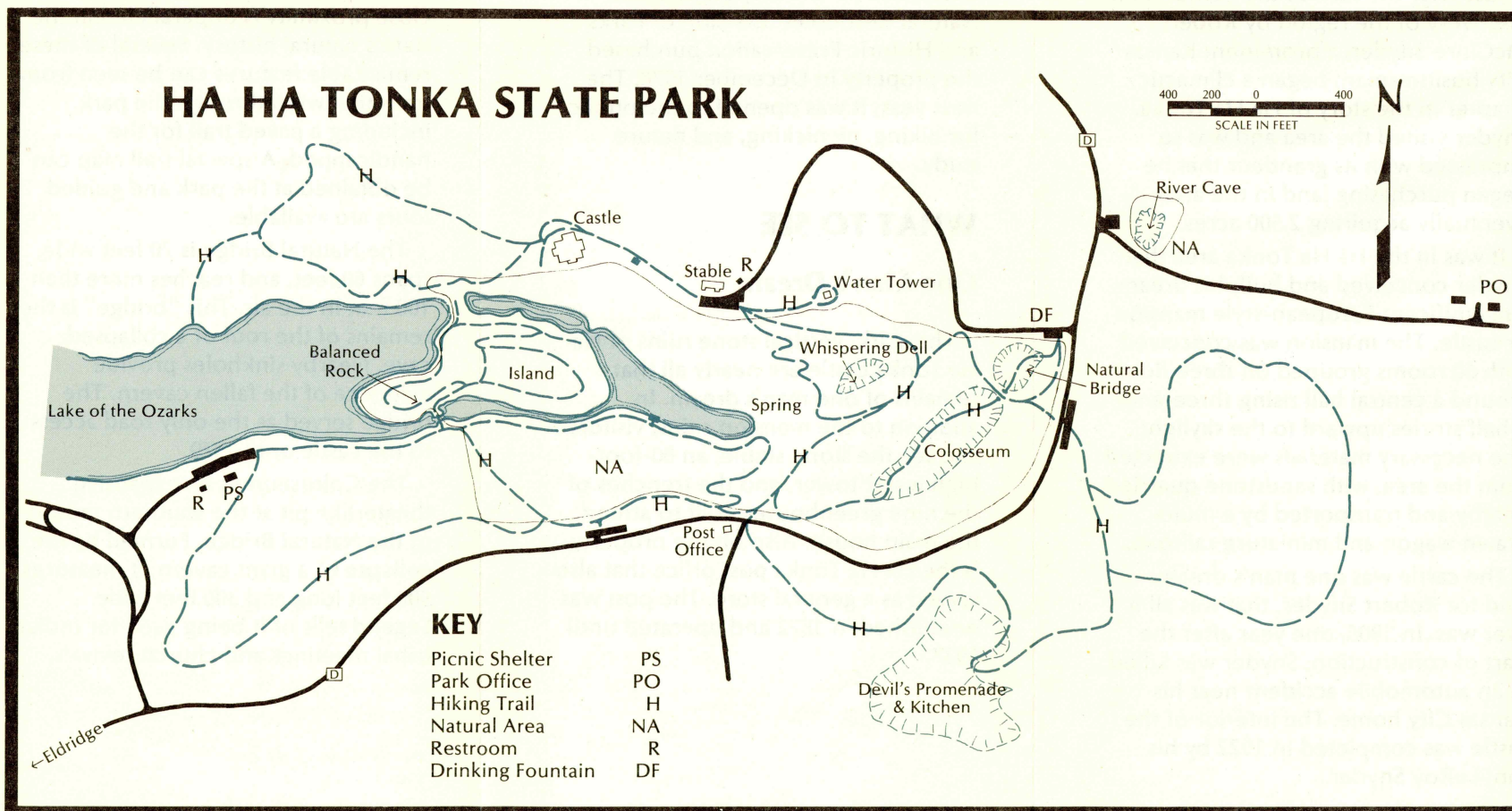
The Natural Bridge is 70 feet wide, spans 60 feet, and reaches more than 100 feet in the air. This "bridge" is the remains of the roof of a collapsed cave. Nearby sinkholes provide evidence of the fallen cavern. The bridge served as the only road access to the castle until 1979.

The Colosseum is an expansive theaterlike pit at the southern mouth of the Natural Bridge. Formed by the collapse of a giant cavern, it measures 500 feet long and 300 feet wide. Legend tells of it being used for Indian tribal meetings and church revivals.





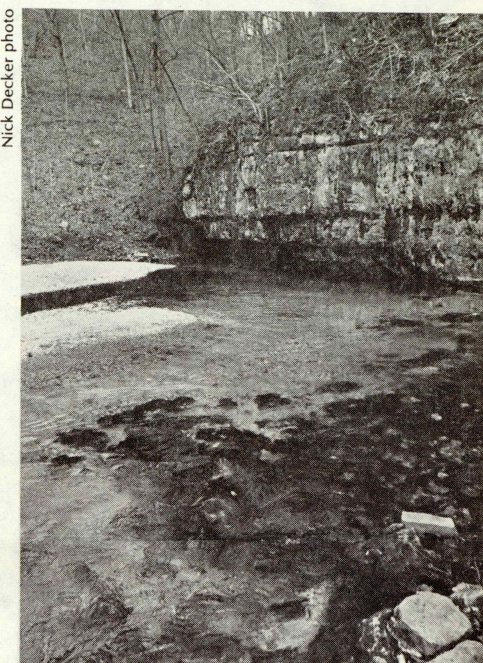
- Please keep pets on leashes at all times.
- Fires should be supervised at all times and restricted to fire pits, barbecue grills, or locations approved by the park superintendent.
- Camping is not allowed in Ha Ha Tonka State Park.
- The park closes each day at sunset.
- Caves can be entered only after obtaining a permit from the park superintendent.
- Please stay on the designated trails.
- Please do not throw rocks off bluffs; they may injure people below.



Whispering Dell sink basin, which is more than 150 feet long, contains the remnants of elongated caverns capable of transmitting the slightest sounds along its entire length. On its steep, sloping sides and at its base, visitors can see evidence of collapsed roofs. Two of the shelters, Counterfeiter's Cave and Robber's Cave, were used by criminals during the 1830s.

Ha Ha Tonka Spring is one of the 15 largest springs in Missouri and exemplifies the great erosional forces that carved the cave system and contributed to its ruin. The spring is the outlet of a large underground river and issues approximately 48 million gallons of water a day. The immense valley or chasm, rimmed by 250-foot-high bluffs and rocky slopes, resulted from the collapse of overlying caverns.

The collapse of two separate cave channels that later filled with water created the Island where the spring branch widens to form a lake. On the slopes of the Island are remnants of the fallen caves, including toppled and tilted blocks of limestone. One formation known as the Balanced Rock has been precariously situated by the eroding forces of nature.



Ha Ha Tonka Spring

As a transition area between the Ozark forests and the Salem Plateau, Ha Ha Tonka State Park has an example of savanna landscape within its boundaries. In these savannas, abundant prairie grasses such as little bluestem and Indian grass flourish in open forests of blackjack oak, post oak, and white oak. Several large glades also can be found within the savannas. These natural rocky grasslands are often so desertlike that plant and animal species usually associated with southwestern United States are found here. Glade inhabitants include the large yellow-flowered Missouri evening primrose, the Missouri brown-eyed susan, and the prairie scorpion.